

PROPOSAL 41

5 AAC 06.361. Nushagak-Mulchatna King Salmon Management Plan.

Reduce fishing time in the Nushagak District commercial salmon fishery when the Nushagak River sport fishery is restricted for king salmon conservation, as follows:

Nush Chinook Option 1

When the Nushagak Chinook run is not meeting minimums and the Sport Fishing user group has in season Emergency Orders for stepping down (example: no bait, catch and release, or closures), then the Commercial fishery must also participate in the conservation effort for protecting the Chinook run. The ComFish Department shall not open the Nushagak district to more than 12 hours time total of commercial drift and set fishing in a 24 hour period when the Department has issued EO's restricting the sport fishing user group. The department can break the 12 hours up into two 6 hour openers or any other combination as long as the open commercial fishing time does not total more than 12 hours in a 24 hour period. Additionally, the Department shall not run two 12 hour openers back to back--meaning there can not be a 12 hour opener starting at 12:00 Noon and ending at Mid-night and then another opener starting at 12:00 Midnight and running to 12:00 Noon. The Drift and Set user group openings do not have to be at the same time periods. However, the total for each group cannot exceed 12 hours each when the Sport Fish EO's are in place. Thus, Drift could be open for 12 straight hours from 1:00 AM to 1:00 PM and Set could be open from 3:00 AM to 9:00 AM and again from 4:00 PM to 10:00 PM. The definition of a 24 hour period would start at 12:00 Midnight and end at 11:59 PM on that same day. Once the Sport Fish biologist removes all EO's restricting effort of the Sport Fishing user group in the district the Commercial openings can go back to as directed by the ComFish Biologist with no time restrictions.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? The burden of conservation of the Nushagak Chinook Salmon run is 100% on the shoulders of the Sport Fishing industry. There are efforts made by Com Fish with mesh sizing that try to eliminate the by-catch of Chinook when targeting sockeye but there is still a large enough by-catch that it has an impact on the fishery. Sport Fish is not trying to prevent the Com Fish industry from catching sockeye and making a living. The impact on the number of Chinook making it in river is immediately diminished when commercial openers happen. This is not intended by the Com Fisher, but it happens. We need help in preserving the Nushagak Chinook run. When the Chinook run falls below acceptable escapement numbers, the sport fishery is restricted or potentially closed, yet com fish openings remain aggressive. The commercial fishery in the Nushagak district, although targeting sockeye, certainly has a by-catch or interception of Chinook bound for the Nushagak. At low estimates of 3 Chinook intercepted per vessel in a 12 hour opener and 400 vessels in the district we are talking about 1,200 Chinook. Many times the district is open for 23.5 or 24 hour periods thus hitting both tides and intercepting double that amount per day--2,400 Chinook in our example. That equates to 16,800 Chinook harvested via by-catch in one 7 day period. The Board is encouraged to take preventive measures to ensure that the Nushagak Chinook run survives.

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(EF-F18-067)
